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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 SANAA 000857

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SUBJECT: RESPONDING TO POTUS DIRECTIVE: TRANSPORT AND

TRAINING: HOW TO HELP THE YEMENIS

REF: FRANCESCHI - KHOURY EMAIL OF 5/3/2007

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Classified By: Ambassador Thomas C. KRAJESKI for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Following President Saleh's May 2 meeting with President Bush, during which he requested more military assistance, and in preparation for a Policy Coordination Committee meeting scheduled for May 10, Post proposes several ideas in line with Yemen's current and future security challenges. While President Saleh linked his requests to the events in Saada, the reality is that the conflict there may be resolved before any U.S. assistance could arrive and be made operational. The difficulty the Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) is having in resolving that conflict is, however, symptomatic of the challenges the Government faces elsewhere in the country now and in the future.

Particularly, events of the past 18 months have demonstrated that the ROYG lacks the capability to deploy its forces quickly, securely, and reliably to all four corners of its territory to extend the rule of law over ungoverned spaces, and deter terrorist operations.

¶2. (C) Post therefore proposes using Section 1206 funding to provide lightly armored but highly mobile vehicles and light reconnaissance aircraft. Emergency funding via the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program could be used to establish a long-term equipment maintenance capability, and quickly improve Yemeni officers' English skills -- critical components for any future assistance to be effective. END SUMMARY

¶3. (C) The current conflict in Saada exemplifies the kind of challenge that the ROYG faces all over Yemen: geographically rough terrain inhabited by people who have virtually never been subjected to centralized rule, and who, thanks to poorly controlled borders, have an array of weaponry at their disposal. For centuries, Yemen's central governments have kept control over various regions through a complex system of tribal balancing, pay-outs, turning a blind eye to illicit activities, and) on occasion) military force. As the al-Houthis have demonstrated in Saada, however, when opposition to the Government runs deeply enough, the ROYG can have great difficulty in exerting meaningful military pressure.

The Mobility Dilemma

¶4. (C) One primary reason for this is the Yemeni Army's difficulty in deploying safely and quickly to remote, mountainous regions. In Saada, ROYG forces have suffered heavy casualties, mainly due to ambushes and snipers using armor-piercing ammunition against convoys. In late 2005/early 2006, the ROYG took several weeks to resolve a tribal kidnapping of western tourists in Marib, partially due to the time required by the armed forces to deploy to the area and set up a security perimeter around where the kidnappers were holed up.

¶5. (S) In this context, post has prepared a Section 1206 funding proposal to provide wheeled improved infantry fighting vehicles (IFV) as part of the solution to the ROYG's mobility challenge. Post believes that wheeled IFVs, as opposed to tracked vehicles that could be procured through the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program, are more adapted to the Yemeni context for three reasons. First, an improved wheeled IFV, such as the Cougar or the High-Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV), provides better protection against fifty caliber projectiles, which are a threat in Yemen. Second, wheeled vehicles provide better maneuverability in difficult mountain and desert terrain. Third, the ROYG's security forces have a proven ability to provide for the basic repair, maintenance and service to wheeled vehicles. In addition, President Saleh personally identified this type of vehicle as a primary need for his armed forces during a meeting with Charge prior to his Washington visit.

¶6. (S) Post estimates that 25 HMMWVs and 50 Cougars with logistics packages would cost around USD 40 million. These vehicles would be used to equip units in counterterrorism operations.

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¶7. (C) Post also recommends that the USG continue to press the Saudis, Qataris, and Emiratis at the highest level, urging that they transfer excess armored vehicles from their own fleets as quickly as possible to the ROYG.

Reconnaissance Aircraft

¶8. (C) The second crucial element for the ROYG to be able to deploy its ground forces safely is an aerial reconnaissance platform. This would allow the ROYG to survey areas prior to deployment, and better monitor its borders to interdict large arms shipments and reduce illegal border crossings. The ROYG's small F-5 fleet at one time had reconnaissance capabilities, but their cameras are broken and would cost millions of dollars to repair, and pilot proficiency on these aircraft is increasingly difficult for the Yemenis to maintain.

¶9. (S) Post's Section 1206 proposal, therefore, includes a request for AT-6 turbo-propeller aircraft. This platform is versatile and reliable, and is easier to fly and maintain than jet aircraft. The AT-6 can be used for low-altitude reconnaissance, and can also be mounted with weapons for close air support roles, which the Yemeni Air Force is currently unable to perform. Unlike traditional fighter aircraft, the AT-6 would not pose a threat to neighboring states, or likely raise their objections. Post estimates that each aircraft, outfitted with a reconnaissance capability and with a logistics package, would cost approximately USD 10 million.

¶10. (S) The ROYG requested imagery from an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) flyover. In response, post provided the MOD with a questionnaire requesting information on times,

locations and purpose for the flyover. The MOD has not returned a completed questionnaire at this time. Post will continue to work with the MOD, and will coordinate with CENTCOM once the questionnaire is made available. DAO SANAA plans to meet by May 11 with MOD officials to press for further details.

IMET

¶11. (C) Outside of Section 1206 funding, post believes that emergency IMET funds could be used to quickly address the MOD's shortfalls in English-language capability. The lack of English proficiency in the MOD is a major obstacle to U.S. military assistance. Candidates with adequate English for senior and mid-level training can be difficult to identify and often require additional language training. Technical training teams always require interpreters, and manuals must be translated at great cost and expense.

¶12. (C) To address this critical need, post has created a Foreign Military Financing (FMF) case to pay for 30 MOD members to receive English-language training. With additional IMET funding, post could significantly increase the number of trainees.

¶13. (C) Language training, however, is only a stepping stone to meeting the MOD's more critical need: repair and maintenance of U.S.-provided equipment and vehicles. Emergency IMET funding should also be used to bring in Technical Assistance Field Teams capable of identifying, creating, and implementing a plan on how best to improve MOD's ability to maintain EDA and other U.S. materiel assistance. MOD's inability to repair and maintain U.S. equipment and vehicles is a major hindrance to operational effectiveness, and remedying this shortcoming should be a key component of any long-term assistance plan.

Helping Yemen Over the Long Term

¶14. (C) No matter what security assistance package the USG decides on for Yemen, the reality is that the Saada conflict may be resolved before the first vehicle or trainer arrives in country. This should not, however, deter us from implementing President Bush's directive to help the Yemenis.

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The primary security challenges the ROYG faces in Saada are the same it would face elsewhere in the country: a lack of secure and reliable mobility, no aerial reconnaissance capability, and an MOD staff that has little ability to maintain equipment and vehicles that we donate. Taking the initiative now to fill these gaps will pay dividends later, when the ROYG faces threats to stability emanating from another of Yemen's ungoverned spaces.

¶15. (C) As we look beyond the current problems of mobility and maintenance, the USG should also consider the reforms that Yemen's security institutions must undergo in order to make them more adapted to the threats that Yemen faces now and in the future, and to improve their ability to work with the United States and partner nations. Post will share its thoughts on these topics, from the perspective of the past seven years of security assistance, via septel.

KRAJESKI